

Lessons Learned

During the Implementation of Wisconsin Family Care Aging and Disability Resource Centers

1999-2002

Getting Started

Wisconsin counties decided to develop aging and disability resource centers (ADRCs) for a variety of reasons, including:

- To enhance already existing services, including information and assistance (I&A).
- To eliminate duplication in I&A functions between different agencies.
- To develop better access. Especially for people with physical disabilities, there was no central place in the county to go for information.

Key Lessons Learned and Tips for Developing an ADRC

All local county departments and agencies involved with long-term care need to engage in joint strategic planning and develop a shared vision.

- TIP: Do not lose the primary focus on information and assistance and options counseling.

Support from governing boards is necessary to assure needed resources are available, including adequate staff, physically accessible space, private places to meet with consumers, marketing materials, etc.

One of the things that made development of the ADRCs possible was local agencies and staff who were effective at teamwork, were willing to put

people first, and to give up organizational turf in order to do that.

- TIP: Link up with developed ADRCs for mentoring, and use software and information systems already developed by other resource centers.

Aging Agencies

In some ways local aging agencies are naturals to develop ADRCs. They have experience with people of all socio-economic groups and a broader mission than just access to public benefits, routinely interact with people not familiar with public programs, and are perceived as having a broader mission than connecting people with public benefits.

It has been a challenge for aging agencies to learn about disability resources and issues, but it has also been a very positive opportunity for growth.

- It took some time for aging agencies to change the organizational culture from advocacy for older adults, to a broader perspective incorporating other target groups as well.
- Staff broadened their knowledge base as they began to work with other target groups, and this strengthens the agency as a whole and enhances services to older adults as well. The target groups have more in common than initially recognized.

ADRCs that also administer Older Americans Act funds need to implement systems to assure those funds are used only for older adults, not other target groups served by the ADRC.

Human Service/Social Service Agencies

Local human service/social service departments bring their own strengths when developing ADRCs.

- County social service/human service departments already had an intake system, including close collaboration with financial eligibility determination, that made it easier to develop the entry point to publicly-funded long-term care programs.
- Because of the public perception of the county human service or social service department as the “welfare agency,” some degree of separation between the ADRC and the rest of the county department may be helpful in reaching a broader group of people. Human service and social service departments needed to be careful in assigning people with a broad focus to staff the ADRC.
- Strong interaction and collaboration with local aging programs is necessary for the ADRC meet its goals.

Outreach and Marketing

Outreach and marketing need to be done on an ongoing basis, in order to continually keep the resource center visible to the public. People are more likely to “hear the message” when they are in need and pay less attention to it when they don’t think it applies to them (yet). It takes all kinds of staff to be involved in the outreach efforts, including administrative, nursing, and social work.

Hard to reach groups have included ethnic groups such as Southeast Asians and Spanish-speaking people. Staff must be able to access resources to provide culturally competent services, such as by contracting with an individual interpreter who is familiar with the population, or working with a community spokesperson for hard to reach populations like Southeast Asian elders. It has also been a challenge to reach adults with developmental disabilities living at home with middle-aged or elderly parents. Once you’re out of school, if you are not participating in other services, you aren’t known to the system.

Information Systems

Developing, paying for and continuing to support information systems necessary for I&A has been a challenge. This includes the phone system, especially establishing after-hours service.

Do not minimize the amount of time it takes to keep the resource database updated. It takes a lot of time and resources to keep the resource database updated. Some ADRCs have found a community partner for this, most frequently the United Way First Call for Help. Others have used pre-existing software packages to establish their database. Also, the ADRC needs a library of printed materials, such as brochures.

Also vital to implementation of new resource centers is to get the information system that tracks client contacts up and running quickly, to track I&A activity history for individual contacts.

Information and Assistance

In selecting I&A staff, look for good communication skills, including ability to communicate effectively in person or on the phone, interviewing and listening skills, being non-judgmental (keeping the focus on consumer’s agenda, not the staffs’), and good observational skills (is what I’m observing consistent with what

I'm seeing?). I&A staff need to be ready to offer short-term, rather than long-term, services, and understand what this means for the relationship with the consumer. Experience or background with the target population is very important, as is knowledge of how the service system works. ADRCs need to have professional staff (social work and nursing) or to work with other local departments or agencies to get it.

It takes at least a year to be a fully trained I&A specialist, and ongoing training is also necessary. Mentoring and shadowing experienced staff is one of the most effective ways of training new I&A staff.

Options Counseling

Options counseling isn't easily confined to one contact. Good options counseling requires development of trusting relationships with consumers by talking with an individual over and over until that trust is established.

Over time, RC staff has become more planful and consistent in what they talk with people about, and having menus and checklists has been helpful in this.

Most consumers want the RC staff to make the linkage to services, rather than having consumers do that themselves.

Short-Term Case Management

Doing short-term case management is a natural component of being in the I&A business. Private-pay and publicly-funded people have the same short-term case management needs. There are

also just some people who have fallen through the cracks and haven't accessed any part of the long-term care delivery system.

Examples of how resource centers can provide short-term help is by maintaining a list of people who provide chore services, and by doing criminal background checks for those people. This approach has increased access to services for private-pay consumers who need long-term care.

Prevention

Prevention activities are useful tools for marketing and outreach – they get RC staff connected to some people they might not otherwise reach. For example, doing prevention activities at meal sites has also increased use of meal programs.

It has been helpful for resource centers to partner with other county agencies, in particular public health. If the RC has a staff nurse, that person's involvement has also been very beneficial with the prevention programs.

Eligibility

Communication and collaboration between all local entities involved in eligibility is vital to make the process work for consumers. In Wisconsin, this has meant that the resource center, care management organization (CMO), economic support and enrollment consultant all work closely together. Having written access plans or memoranda of understanding (MOUUs) between parties is helpful in having a common ground to refer back to.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Wisconsin's aging and disability resources and the Family Care program, please visit our web site at: dhfs.wisconsin.gov/LTCare, or write:

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